

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 281236Z DEC 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4211

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 9776

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PINT PGOV PO
SUBJECT: REMARKS BY EANES ON POLITICAL SCENE

1. FAREWELL DINNER: ON DEC 27 PRESIDENT AND MRS. EANES HAD MY WIFE AND ME TO BELEM PALACE FOR A FAREWELL FAMILY DINNER. ONLY THE FOUR OF US WERE PRESENT. MOST OF THE TALK WAS SOCIAL CHATTER AND DISCUSSION ABOUT MY FUTURE RESPONSIBILITIES, IN WHICH EANES DISPLAYED A KEEN INTEREST. HE ALSO EXPRESSED GREAT APPRECIATION FOR US SUPPORT THESE PAST THREE YEARS. IN THE COURSE OF THE EVENING, IN ADDITION TO CONFIRMING THAT HE WOULD "DESIGNATE" SOARES TO FORM A GOVERNMENT (SEPTEL), EANES DID MAKE SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE LOCAL SCENE.

2. THE FAILINGS OF THE CONSTITUTION: EANES SAID THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS HAD REVEALED GREAT DEFECTS IN THE PORTUGUESE CONSTITUTION. THE DRAFTERS HAD INTENDED TO BUILD IN CHECKS AND BALANCES, BUT IN SO DOING THEY HAD DEPRIVED ANY BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT OF THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY TO BREAK AN IMPASSE. THE PRESIDENT WAS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE, BUT THERE WAS LITTLE HE COULD DO IN A SITUATION WHERE A GROUP OF MINORITY PARTIES WERE CONCERNED PRINCIPALLY WITH THEIR OWN POLITICAL INTERESTS. (HE WOULD BE GLAD TO "GIVE THE US ANY OF THE PARTIES.") SINCE THE PRESIDENT WAS ELECTED FOR A
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FIVE YEAR TERM, A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM WOULD HAVE GIVEN GREATER STABILITY TO THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS. AS THINGS NOW STAND THE PRESIDENT IS POWERLESS EVEN TO FIRE AN INCOMPETENT SECRETARY OF STATE. HE CITED AS AN EXAMPLE STATE SECRETARY FOR FISHERIES COELHO, A "NICE BUT INCOMPETENT PERSON" WHO HAS BEEN "DAMAGING THE COUNTRY'S INTERESTS FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS."

3. SECOND SOARES GOVERNMENT: EANES WAS CRITICAL OF THE LACK OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY OF THE FIRST SOARES GOVERNMENT, AND WAS NOT VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT NAMING SOARES TO FORM A SECOND GOVERNMENT. HE SAW IT AS THE LEAST BAD OF A SERIES OF BAD ALTERNATIVES. ELECTIONS WOULD CREATE TERRIBLE PROBLEMS FOR THE COUNTRY, A GOVERNMENT OF TECHNOCRATS DID NOT SEEM FEASIBLE, AND IT HAD BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO GET THE PARTIES TO AGREE TO A COMMON PLATFORM. EANES WOULD HAVE PREFERRED A PS/PSD GOVERNMENT WHICH COULD HAVE EVENTUALLY LED TO A COALITION, BUT "SA CARNEIRO WAS TOO INTERESTED IN BEING PRIME MINISTER OR VICE PRIME MINISTER TO ACCEPT MY EFFORT OF LAST AUGUST IN THIS DIRECTION." HENCE THE ONLY OPTION WAS A PS/CDS SUPPORT GOVERNMENT. SUCH A GOVERNMENT WOULD BE A FRAGILE ONE SINCE THE PS AND CDS PROGRAMS WERE SO DIVERSE. THE CDS WOULD ALSO BE VULNERABLE TO ATTACKS FROM THE PSD ON BOTH ITS LEFT AND RIGHT FLANK.

4. PERSONALITIES: DURING THE COURSE OF THE EVENING EANES TOUCHED ON VARIOUS PERSONALITIES. HE HAS NO USE FOR CUNHAL AND THE PCP WHICH HE REGARDS AS JUST A TOOL OF MOSCOW. HE CONSIDERS FREITAS DO AMARAL "A TRUE STATESMAN." HE FINDS THE SOCIALISTS "GOOD PEOPLE" BUT TOO INTERESTED IN THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR PARTY. THE PSD'S SOUSA FRANCO IS A SENSIBLE MAN WHO TRIES TO SHOW SOME FLEXIBILITY BUT IS UNABLE TO AS LONG AS THE PSD IS DOMINATED BY SA CARNEIRO. EANES CHARACTERIZED SA CARNEIRO AS "A MAN WITH A PERSECUTION COMPLEX
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WHO THINKS HE IS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE." IT WAS VERY CLEAR FROM THIS AND OTHER CAUSTIC COMMENTS THAT HE HAS LITTLE RESPECT FOR SA CARNEIRO.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LISBON 9776

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5. EANES'S FRAME OF MIND: I HAD EXPECTED TO FIND EANES TOTALLY EXHAUSTED FROM HIS SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES. HE WAS TIRED, BUT HE BOUNCED BACK QUICKLY. RECALLING HIS MILITARY CAREER HE CHARACTERIZED THE POLITICAL MEETINGS AS WORSE THAN WAR "SINCE AT LEAST IN WAR YOU KNOW WHO THE ENEMY IS." NONETHELESS HE ADDED, THE PORTUGUESE PENCHANT FOR DALOGUE WAS VASTLY PREFERABLE TO VIOLENCE. EANES WAS CONCERNED ABOUT PORTUGAL'S FUTURE BUT WAS IN NO WAY PESSIMISTIC OR DEPRESSED. TO THE CONTRARY, HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN WHO WAS TAKING THE CRISIS IN STRIDE, UNDERSTOOD THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM AND HAD LAID OUT THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION HE COULD. HE WAS PARTICULARLY ALERT TO THE NEED TO ABOID THE BREAKUP OF THE PS, THEREBY LEAVING THE ENTIRE LEFT WIDE OPEN TO THE PCP. BUT HE WAS EQUALLY AWARE THAT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS HAD TO BE SOLVED AT A FASTER PACE IN ORDER TO AVOID A RESURGENCE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT.

6. COMMENT: IN HIS EIGHTEEN MONTHS AS PRESIDENT, EANES HAS LOST NONE OF HIS DOWN-TO-EARTH SIMPLICITY. THE DINNER WAS EXTREMELY INFORMAL WITH ONE OF HIS CHILDREN PLAYING WITH BUILDING BLOCKS ON THE TABLE WHILE WE ATE. IN CONTRAST TO HIS PUBLIC IMAGE EANES WAS QUITE RELAXED AND TALKATIVE. HE HAS A DRY SENSE OF HUMOR AND A WIDE RANGE OF INTERESTS. FOR EXAMPLE HE SHARES HIS WIFE'S INTEREST IN THE SOCIAL AREA
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AND LAMENTS THAT MORE HAS NOT BEEN DONE HERE FOR GROUPS SUCH AS THE ELDERLY AND ORPHANS. HE HAS AN UNSWERVING COMMITMENT TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND REMAINS VERY MUCH HIS OWN MAN. IF PUSH COMES TO SHOVE I THINK HE WOULD RESIGN BEFORE STEPPING OUTSIDE THE BOUNDS OF THE CONSTITUTION. I FIND HIM INTELLIGENT, PRO-WESTERN, DECISIVE AND COURAGEOUS. HE IS AS EQUAL TO THE TASK OF PRESIDENT AS ANYONE I HAVE MET DURING MY TOUR IN PORTUGAL.
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